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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT: UPPER HOUSE ELECTIONS SET FOR
SEPTEMBER 8

REF: A. RABAT 1506
[1](#)B. RABAT 1415

[1](#)1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: On September 8, Morocco will hold indirect elections for 90 of the 270 seats in the Chamber of Councilors, the upper house of parliament. The official campaign period started September 1 and runs through midnight on September 7. In late August, the Minister of Interior outlined to the Parliament measures adopted by the MOI to ensure transparency in the upcoming elections. Several lower house parliamentarians, however, called the steps "absolutely insufficient." Several political parties have also openly questioned the upper house's mandate, and the very existence of two parliamentary chambers. While a topic of conversation among Morocco's elite, upper house elections do not resonate with the population at large. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Indirect elections for one-third of the 270 seats in Morocco's Chamber of Councilors, the upper house of parliament, will take place on September 8. Building on the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) August 4 joint communiqué (ref A), the MOI on August 27 issued a statement detailing official procedures for the upcoming elections. According to the MOI, the official submission of candidacies took place between August 28 and August 31, while the official election campaign period started September 1 and runs through midnight on September [1](#)7. In the complex formula spelled out by the law, of the 90 seats to be elected on September 8, municipal councils will elect 54 seats, chambers of agriculture will elect 11 seats, chambers of commerce, industry and service will elect 8 seats, chambers of handicraft industries will elect 7 seats, chambers of maritime fishing will elect 1 seat, and labor unions will elect 9 seats.

Background On The Upper House

[1](#)4. (SBU) Morocco's 1996 constitution established a bicameral legislature consisting of a lower house - the Chamber of Representatives, and an upper house - the Chamber of Councilors. The upper house's 270 members serve nine-year terms, with one-third (90) of the chamber's

membership elected every three years. Members of the upper house are elected by regional electoral colleges. In a given regional electoral college, those eligible to vote include: members of municipal councils, professional chambers, and labor unions. (Note: Municipal councils and the lower house of parliament are the only directly elected representative political institutions. End Note.) In 1997, all 270 seats of the upper house were elected for the first time. Elections were held in 2000 to renew one-third of the councilors elected in 1997, as was the case in ¶2003. (NB: In 2000 and 2003, a lottery system determined which councilors would be part of the one-third up for renewal.) The remaining 90 seats up for election this year are those of members who have served full nine-year terms.

MOI at Parliament, Lower House Reacts

¶5. (SBU) On August 24, Minister of Interior Chakib Benmoussa appeared before the lower house's Interior Commission, his first appearance before parliament since becoming the Minister of Interior in February, to discuss the measures the MOI has put in place to limit the number of irregularities in this year's elections. His visit came at the request of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), Istiqlal, Justice and Development Party (PJD), and Popular Movement Union (UMP) parliamentary caucuses. According to French-language daily L'Economiste, Benmoussa explained to parliament that the MOI is determined to check corruption and guarantee transparency in the September 8 election, and outlined that the MOI has met with political parties, issued a joint communiqué with the MOJ, and created an office to centralize election-related

complaints.

¶6. (SBU) Several lower house representatives, led by USFP caucus leader Driss Lachgar, expressed their displeasure with the steps taken by the MOI. According to several media outlets, Lachgar termed the phenomenon of nine representatives resigning from the lower house to run for an upper house seat (ref B) "an act of treason," and pressed Benmoussa to explain why the MOI has not taken tougher measures to prevent these resignations. Lachgar's sentiments were echoed by other lower house parliamentarians, including Ahmed Moufidi (Istiqlal) and Abdelilah Benkirane (PJD). Ahmed Benjelloun, secretary general of the Socialist Democratic Vanguard Party (PADS), was quoted dismissing the MOI's measures as "absolutely insufficient." (Note: PADS has boycotted all elections for the past two decades, but earlier this year announced it would participate in next year's lower house elections. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) The Koutla, the "democratic bloc" alliance between the USFP, Istiqlal, and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), publicly questions the merits of a bicameral parliamentary system. On August 29, Lachgar said in his party's French-language daily Liberation, "in democratic transitions, a country only needs one strong Chamber with a homogeneous majority and a real opposition," adding "currently we have two parliaments with exactly the same prerogatives."

¶8. (SBU) Other political parties have also joined the fray and have openly questioned the upper house's mandate, calling into question the advantages of a two chamber legislative system, and hinting at the benefits of a potential return to one chamber. PADS secretary general Ahmed Benjelloun said, in an August 28 interview with French-language daily Aujourd'hui Le Maroc, that PADS has "always rejected the idea of creating an upper house." Benjelloun added that the upper house in its current configuration is "useless" and is "redundant with the lower house."

Allegations of Irregularities

¶9. (SBU) According to L'Economiste, from July 23 to August 24, the press exposed and reported to the MOI 47 cases of irregularities related to the upper house elections. The 47 infractions were grouped into the following four categories: organizing campaigns before the official start date (21 reported cases), vote buying (17 reported cases), officials showing favor to a candidate (2 reported cases), or using state resources for electoral purposes (3 reported cases). The remaining 4 reported cases were activities that did not fit into these categories. As of August 24, Benmoussa reported that only one infraction, from an unknown source, had been proved. "The allegations reported by the press were too general and lacked proof, making the verification of facts very difficult," Benmoussa explained before parliament.

Not Elections for The People

¶10. (SBU) Upper house elections, although a hot topic of conversation among the elite, do not appear to be resonating with the population at large. With election day less than a week away, most Moroccans have yet to focus on the elections and anecdotal information suggest this apathy is unlikely to change. Semi-private TV channel 2M on August 29 aired the results of an informal survey on Moroccan attitudes on the role of the upper house. Those interviewed shared responses ranging from total unfamiliarity with the upper house to indifference on the matter. (Note: The upper house has traditionally been viewed as an institution for the elite, whereas the lower house, because its members are directly elected, is seen as being closer to the citizens. End Note.)

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